

HABITUATING RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: STRATEGIES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT TOLERANCE IN MULTICULTURAL SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study examines the habituation strategy of religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) and its implications for fostering student tolerance in multicultural school settings. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research was conducted at SDN 2 Sukoreno Umbulsari, Jember. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The findings indicate that the habituation of wasathiyah values is systematically implemented through the integration of IRE content with the hidden curriculum, particularly via diversity-oriented activities and role-playing practices. These strategies effectively cultivate key moderation principles, including tawasut (balance), tasamuh (tolerance), and 'Adil (justice). The study further reveals a notable enhancement in students' tolerance and inclusive attitudes, as reflected in their capacity for respectful interfaith interaction and their ability to manage minor social conflicts constructively. The findings underscore the importance of institutional support through strengthened school policies and targeted professional development for IRE teachers focusing on habituation-based, multicultural pedagogical approaches. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on religious moderation by demonstrating how schools can foster inclusive learning environments and prepare students to navigate complex social and global challenges.

Keywords: Habituation, Islamic Religious Education, Multicultural Schools, Student Tolerance, Wasathiyah.



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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Indonesia's social landscape has exhibited increasingly complex forms of pluralism, marked by the intensification of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, particularly within educational environments. In this context, education has assumed a strategic role in cultivating values of tolerance, respect for diversity, and religious moderation. Religious moderation, commonly conceptualized as *wasathiyah*, refers to a balanced religious orientation that rejects extremism and intolerance while promoting inclusivity, equilibrium, and justice in socio-religious life. Within formal educational institutions, the internalization of these values has become increasingly critical, as schools function as primary social arenas for shaping students' identities, character formation, and perspectives on diversity (Mukhibat, Istiqomah, & Hidayah, 2023, p. 165).

Global phenomena demonstrate that religious extremism and identity conflicts remain a serious threat to social unity. This emphasizes that education based on values of tolerance and diversity is the primary bulwark against radicalism at the primary education level (Pamungkas, 2024, p. 25). In Indonesia, the government has formulated the Religious Moderation program through the Ministry of Religious Affairs in response to the emergence of intolerance in a number of educational settings. However, the implementation program still faces serious challenges, particularly regarding how pedagogical strategies can translate religious moderation into concrete, systematic learning practices that will instil a lasting impact on student behaviour. One approach currently receiving attention is habituation, the process of instilling values through repeated and integrated activities within school life (Sumarto, 2021, p. 231).

Although several studies have examined religious moderation in the context of Islamic education, most have focused on theoretical aspects, curriculum design, or teacher training. Few studies provide an empirical overview of the practice of habituating moderation values in multicultural elementary education settings and its implications for students' tolerance. Furthermore, previous research tends to position religious moderation as a declarative teaching material, rather than as a process of habituation and internalization of character through daily social interactions in schools. Yet, studies of character education emphasize that value transformation is achieved not only through cognitive instruction, but also through role modeling, the hidden curriculum, and socio-religious habituation in students' daily lives (Anugrah, Supriadi, & Faqihuddin, 2024, p. 404)

Furthermore, there is a scientific debate regarding the effectiveness of the cognitive-doctrinal approach versus the practical-habituated approach in shaping attitudes toward diversity. Some experts hypothesize that normative teaching is sufficient in fostering moderation awareness.

However, others argue that without habituation, the value of moderation stops at knowledge, not action, and thus fails to effectively prevent intolerance. This controversy opens up new research opportunities regarding the importance of examining habituation strategies in developing students' socio-religious competencies in heterogeneous educational environments (Aguslani, 2025, p 55-79).

The study by Prayitno & Wathoni (2022, 23-35) emphasizes the importance of instilling religious moderation values from an early age in Indonesia's plural society to prevent intolerance and conflict. Focusing on elementary schools as a strategic stage for character formation, the research uses a qualitative literature review approach to formulate effective strategies for religious moderation education. The findings aim to support the development of a tolerant, just, harmonious society with a *wasathiyah* (moderate) character. The study by Suryadi (2022, p. 90-102) highlights the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education in fostering religious moderation by internalizing values of tolerance, respect for diversity, and acceptance of differences. The implementation of moderation is carried out through three main pillars: developing a moderation mindset among educators and students, integrating moderation values into the curriculum, and applying inclusive learning practices, supported by educational policies and extracurricular religious activities. The study by Anugrah et al. (2024, p. 404) shows that religious worship habits in schools have a positive impact on students' religious moderation. Through practices such as congregational prayer, tadarus, and regular Quran study, students develop discipline, tolerance, and solidarity, confirming that religious routines can effectively support character education and foster moderate attitudes in a pluralistic society (Anugrah et al., 2024, p. 404). The study by H. Albana (2023, p. 200) reviews various studies on religious moderation education in high schools and finds that intolerance and limited moderation education can lead to interfaith segregation. Using a systematic review approach based on PRISMA guidelines, the study concludes that religious moderation education can be effectively implemented through classroom learning, extracurricular activities, and school programs that internalize moderation values (Albana, 2023, p. 200).

The similarities between previous research and yours lie in their shared primary focus: strengthening the value of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) through formal education. All four previous studies position schools as a strategic space for fostering tolerant, just, and inclusive attitudes in students. Furthermore, all studies emphasize that moderation is not simply taught cognitively but needs to be internalized through the learning process, school culture, and religious and social activities. Values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balance), and *i'tidal* (justice) also form a common thread connecting these studies with yours. The difference with previous research

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tends to be conceptual, policy-based, or generalization-based (literature reviews, systematic reviews, or correlational surveys), and is often conducted at the junior high and senior high school levels. This research has unique in its habituation approach, empirically and in-depthly examined through qualitative case studies in multicultural elementary schools. Your research not only explains what moderation strategies are, but also explains how these habituation practices are operationalized in everyday school life and their direct impact on students' tolerance. Thus, your research complements and expands previous research by providing more detailed practical and contextual contributions at the elementary education level.

Based on empirical contributions regarding the habituation of Religious Moderation in PAI subjects in multicultural schools, the study was conducted at SDN 2 Sukoreno Umbulsari Jember, an elementary school with students from various religious and cultural backgrounds. The focus of this study was to analyze the *wasathiyah* habituation strategies implemented by PAI teachers and the school and to identify their impact on students' tolerance. The study used a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The specific objectives of this study are to identify forms of habituation of *wasathiyah* values in IRE learning in multicultural schools and to analyze teacher strategies in internalizing the values of *tawasut* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice), as well as to explain their implications for the formation of students' attitudes of tolerance. This study aims to complement the shortcomings of previous research that has not detailed the operational aspects and practices of habituation of moderation in elementary education environments. Conceptually, this study tests the argument that habituation is a more effective approach than simply transmitting normative knowledge in religious moderation education.

Furthermore, this study seeks to foster collective awareness of the urgency of instilling moderate attitudes from an early age. It emphasizes that the habituation of *wasathiyah* values should extend beyond administrative or policy-driven initiatives to become a sustained educational movement that shapes an inclusive and dialogical generation capable of living harmoniously within diversity. Accordingly, this research is expected to offer practical guidance for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) schools and teachers in adopting effective strategies for embedding moderate values into everyday learning practices and in cultivating a tolerant and peaceful educational ecosystem.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the contextual and unique habituation process of religious moderation in a multicultural school environment. The study was conducted at SDN 2 Sukoreno Umbulsari Jember, an elementary school characterized by a diverse student population in terms of religious and cultural backgrounds. The research participants consisted of three PAI teachers, the school principal or curriculum vice-principal, and six active student representatives. Data were collected through several techniques, including in-depth interviews to explore teachers' instructional strategies and the perceptions of students and school leaders regarding religious moderation. Non-participant observation was also conducted to examine PAI learning practices, students' social interactions inside and outside the classroom, and school activities based on diversity. In addition, document analysis was carried out on relevant materials such as the PAI syllabus, lesson plans, and student activity programs that reflect the implementation of religious moderation and tolerance values.

The data analysis employed the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three interrelated stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, and simplifying field data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Data display was conducted by organizing the data into narrative descriptions and thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn through continuous verification by comparing patterns across data sources. To ensure data validity, source triangulation and technique triangulation were applied.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Strategy for Implementing *Wasathiyah* Habituation in Islamic Religious Education

Instilling moderate values in PAI is a systematic effort to instil moderate character through a natural and ongoing educational process. In the context of multicultural schools, this strategy is a fundamental element in fostering diversity awareness, dialogue skills, and socio-religious sensitivity among students (Rukmana, Pasaribu, & Sofyan, 2024, p. 145-157). *Wasathiyah* does not stop at knowledge, but demands internalization into attitudes and life habits. Therefore, habituation-based learning provides ample scope for character formation through role models, social experiences, and strengthening school culture. Islamic Religious Education teachers play a central role as facilitators, role models, and promoters of a healthy atmosphere of diversity. They

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are not only tasked with conveying material conceptually, but also with bringing to life the values of *tawazun*, *tasamuh*, *tawasuth*, and *i'tidal* in daily interactions (Syafriada, Riana, Karnia, & Ismail, 2025, p. 114-133).

This process begins with learning design, method selection, and classroom management that is conducive to the emergence of inclusive attitudes. Contextual learning approaches, interactive dialogue, and social role simulations can help students understand diversity as a reality that should be valued, not avoided. Integrating the value of moderation into the curriculum is an important initial foundation. The Islamic Religious Education curriculum, which emphasizes tolerance, respect for religious differences, and a commitment to nationalism, provides clear direction for teachers in developing learning activities (Muharridha & Selvira, 2025, p. 190-213). Research conducted by Hodidin, Wahidmurni, Basri, & Barizi, (2023, p. 177-190) showed that the integration of moderation competencies into learning planning at Al-Irsyad Senior High School, Surabaya, successfully strengthened a culture of tolerance and reduced the potential for conflict between students. The study emphasized that the formulation of attitude competencies, learning indicators, and media and learning resources must incorporate values of social harmony.

However, curriculum alone is not enough to ensure character transformation. Therefore, habits are designed through structured daily activities, such as cross-cultural greetings, group prayer, collaborative community service, and reflective discussions on diversity issues. When students are directly involved in these routines, the process of internalizing values becomes more meaningful. Habituation practices in high schools in Metro showed a significant increase in social awareness and students' ability to respond to differences in a peaceful manner (Fatmasari, Aziz, & Hasyim, 2024, p. 122-156). Active learning methods such as problem-based learning, social simulations, and project-based learning can be used to enrich habituation. Teachers can direct students in diversity projects such as cultural exhibitions, mini-dialogues between groups, or social activities with followers of different religions. Participatory approach based on real practice was very effective in encouraging children to be actively involved in the tolerance process so that the experience of moderation did not stop at the cognitive level (Albana, 2023, p. 200).

In addition, the concept of the hidden curriculum plays a significant role in habituation. School culture, relationships between teachers, and policies that uphold inclusive values create a vibrant space for the practice of moderation. When teachers and other educators demonstrate fairness, openness, and respect for differences, students will emulate this as normal behavior. Rahman, Rambe, & Murniyetti's (2023, p. 126) study explains that teachers' socio-religious role

models have a stronger effect than formal lectures in forming awareness of moderation. On the other hand, inclusive classroom management is an integral element of habituation strategies. Teachers need to ensure all students have a safe space to express their religious experiences without feeling judged or belittled. An empathetic learning environment encourages students to understand others' perspectives. Through approaches such as circle time, daily reflection, and restorative dialogue, students learn to resolve differences constructively. Zakkyfanani & Khoiroh, (2025, p. 129-156) research describes how dialogue-based conflict resolution practices at Al-Azhar Islamic Elementary School in Surabaya create a peaceful academic culture and suppress religious stereotypes.

Monitoring and evaluation are crucial phases to ensure consistent habituation. Evaluation is conducted not only through knowledge tests but also through attitude assessments, social activity portfolios, and behavioral observations. Teachers can utilize reflection journals, tolerance observation sheets, and informal interviews to assess student character development. Evaluation results are then followed up with reinforcement of positive behaviors, counseling if necessary, and recognition of tolerance practices in the classroom. This approach is in line with the findings of Suprpto et al., who emphasized the importance of continuous evaluation in ensuring that religious moderation is inherent in the personality of students (Suprpto, 2020, p. 78). However, the implementation of habituation strategies faces various obstacles. In some schools, teachers lack adequate pedagogical competence in moderation, learning resources are limited, and not all institutions have specific policies to strengthen religious moderation. Therefore, professional training and mentoring are essential. Teacher training curricula must incorporate dialogue facilitation methods, plural classroom management, and the development of a Nusantara character-based habituation model so that teachers can become drivers of a culture of moderation. As emphasized by Albana (2023, p. 200), teacher competence is the main requirement for the successful internalization of moderation values in schools.

Strengthening collaboration between schools, families, and communities also plays a crucial role. The attitudes toward diversity that students learn at school will be stronger if they align with the values instilled at home and in their surrounding communities. Moderation-based partnership programs such as community service, visits between places of worship, or cross-community cultural dialogues can broaden students' perspectives. When students witness the actual practice of social harmony in their communities, the habituation process becomes more authentic and sustainable (Wangsanata, Yani, & Hasani, 2022, p. 120-145). Overall, the *wasathiyah* habituation

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strategy in IRE is a comprehensive approach that combines aspects of the curriculum, school culture, social interactions, and direct experiences in daily life. This approach goes beyond simply transferring religious knowledge, but also fosters spiritual-social character development that values universal humanity. If implemented systematically and consistently, habituation-based education can develop a generation that is not only intelligent in religious literacy but also able to live within diversity with empathy and mutual respect.

Table 1. Main Research Findings on *Wasathiyah* Habituation in Islamic Religious Education

| No | Main Findings | Description | Educational Implications |
|----|---|---|--|
| 1 | Integration of <i>Wasathiyah</i> in Curriculum and Learning Practices | The value of <i>wasathiyah</i> is internalized through inclusive learning design, integration of moderation attitudes in the curriculum, and the use of contextual and dialogical approaches | PAI learning does not stop at knowledge transfer, but forms a reflective and applicative moderation awareness |
| 2 | Habituation Moderation through School Culture and Teacher Exemplary | <i>Wasathiyah</i> habituation takes place effectively through routine activities, participatory learning methods, <i>hidden curriculum</i> , and teacher examples as a model of <i>tawazun</i> , <i>tasamuh</i> , <i>tawasuth</i> , and <i>i'tidal values</i> | The formation of students' moderate character in a sustainable manner through social experience and real habituation |
| 3 | Strengthening the Moderation Ecosystem through Evaluation and Collaboration | Attitude monitoring, continuous evaluation, teacher competency improvement, and school-family-community collaboration are key factors for the sustainability of habituation | Internalize the value of moderation to be more consistent, authentic, and contextual with students' social lives |

Implications of Habituation on Student Tolerance

Schools can also utilize symbolic media as a means of habituation, for example, through posters emphasizing the value of moderation, slogans about anti-violence, literacy corners on tolerance, and historical narratives of moderate figures. Such media are not merely institutional ornaments but are positioned as visual sources of moral internalization. Students are exposed to ethical messages daily, so that the idea of *wasathiyah* is ingrained through repeated stimuli. Traditions of moderate religious literacy, such as reading exemplary stories of religious figures who prioritize peace, also strengthen students' cognitive-affective experiences, leading to a deeper understanding of moderation. In addition to visual media and formal activities, the hidden curriculum plays a significant role in character formation. Teacher communication patterns, methods of punishment or reward, and school policies for handling conflict are all examples of crucial indirect learning. When minor classroom conflicts are handled with a restorative approach rather than harsh punishment students learn that problem-solving must be fair and peace-oriented.

Non-discriminatory policies for all students, regardless of family background, religion, or ethnicity, provide a concrete example of the application of the principle of justice in educational life (Samsul, 2020, p. 54)

The implications of habituating moderate values in the educational environment are evident in the way students understand, experience, and practice tolerance more deeply. When the value of moderation is not merely taught as conceptual knowledge but instilled through daily experiences, students are able to internalize tolerance as a habit inherent in their personalities. This habituation process transforms moderation into more than just a moral slogan, but rather a socio-religious identity reflected in students' mindsets and behaviours when facing diversity (Albana, 2023, p. 200). One of the most significant implications of habituating moderate values is the growth of social sensitivity to differences in beliefs, cultures, and social backgrounds. Students begin to view diversity not as a divider, but as an opportunity for mutual understanding and respect. They become accustomed to existing in environments that demand empathy, respect for differing opinions, and maintaining harmonious social relationships. Through continuous practice, students have a stronger tendency to resolve conflicts peacefully and avoid verbal and physical violence in daily interactions (Moldovan & Bocoş, 2021, p. 124-145).

The strengthening of tolerance is also evident in students' ability to build equal and respectful communication. Teacher-led classroom discussions using an inclusive approach, collaborative activities across groups, and experiences of social solidarity through social activities and religious ceremonies foster dialogue skills based on mutual respect. Students learn to avoid presumptuous truth claims and to refrain from easily judging differing religious views. Thus, the habituation process becomes an important foundation for developing mature and ethical communication patterns (Sari, Syukriyah, & Husna, 2024, p. 177-190). Furthermore, habituation to the value of *wasathiyah* (modesty) improves students' ability to manage their emotions and religious attitudes proportionally. They are less easily provoked by issues of intolerance, less trapped in blind fanaticism, and are able to position themselves fairly when viewing socio-religious issues. The collective experiences created by schools through a multicultural culture provide a space for students to practice social wisdom in real life. This environment fosters stable moderate attitudes, rather than fleeting responses, because it is based on repeated moral experiences reinforced through social interactions (Usfiyanto & Yuliastutik, 2024, p. 122-135).

Another important implication is the development of skills for peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic society. Students who are accustomed to the practice of moderation in school are better

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prepared to face social heterogeneity outside the educational environment. They are able to build broader social relationships, become open to new cultural experiences, and avoid exclusive attitudes that isolate them from other communities. Thus, habituation produces a young generation ready to become agents of peace and social cohesion within their communities. Psychologically, cultivating the value of moderation creates a positive emotional atmosphere among students. Feelings of safety, respect, and acceptance become emotional experiences that shape students' tendencies to respect others. When the learning environment is free from discrimination and prejudice, students grow with an inclusive social identity, self-confidence, and resistance to narratives of hatred. This condition is crucial in shaping a generation with humanistic character and oriented towards universal humanitarian values (Amtiran & Kriswibowo, 2024, p. 127-144). In other words, habituation not only produces a cognitive understanding of tolerance but also creates a tolerant character that is ingrained in their behavior. Students become individuals capable of accepting differences, managing conflict wisely, and actively participating in creating a peaceful and harmonious environment. This transformation demonstrates that habituation-based education has great power in shaping a generation ready to face the complex socio-religious dynamics of the future with maturity and moral responsibility. Findings from the impact of habituation of student tolerance as in the following figure.

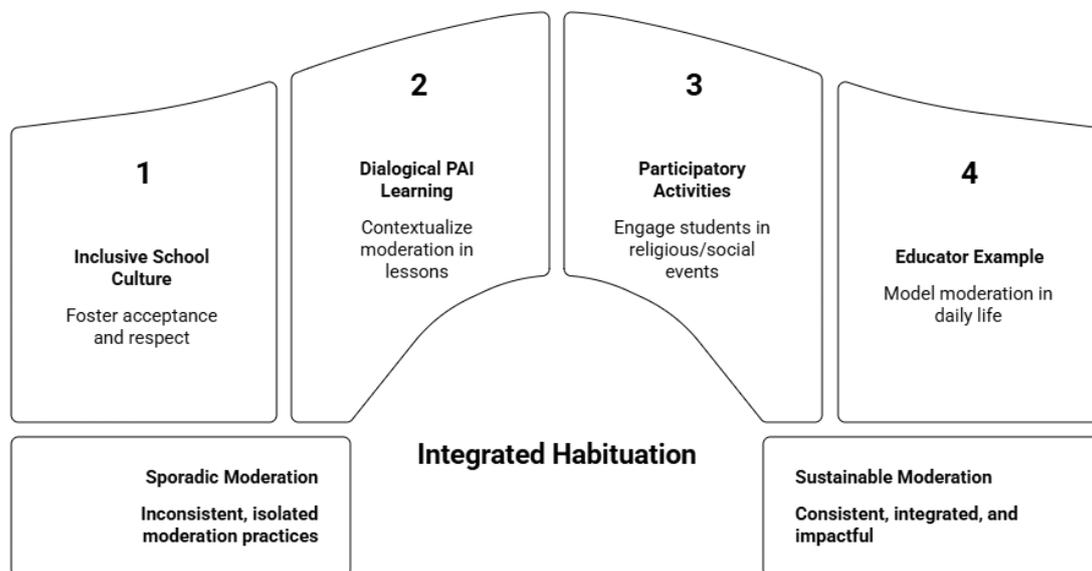


Figure 1. The impact of Habituation on Student Tolerance

Based on the findings of the research, it can be concluded that the habituation of religious moderation in schools does not take place sporadically, but is manifested in a systematic, integrated, and sustainable habituation pattern in daily school life. The forms of habituation of moderation at

SDN 2 Sukoreno Umbulsari Jember are clearly reflected in four main domains, namely habituation through an inclusive school culture, dialogical and contextual PAI learning practices, and participatory religious and social activities, as well as the example of educators as part of the hidden curriculum. This habituation does not stop at the introduction of the value of moderation normatively, but is manifested in concrete practices that allow students to directly experience the values of *tawasut* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice) in social interaction across differences. These findings confirm that religious moderation is more effectively instilled through repeated moral experiences than simply the transfer of cognitive knowledge. Thus, this sub-discussion is in line with the purpose of the research as stated in the abstract and conclusion, which shows that *wasathiyah* habituation in multicultural elementary schools plays a significant role in shaping the tolerant and inclusive character of students.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted with the objective of identifying the forms of *wasathiyah* habituation in IRE learning within a multicultural elementary school and analyzing their implications for students' tolerance. The findings explicitly demonstrate that the habituation of religious moderation values is implemented through integrated school practices, including inclusive school culture, dialogical PAI learning, routine religious and social activities, and the exemplary behaviour of teachers as part of the hidden curriculum. These forms of habituation effectively internalize the values of *tawasut* (balance), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *i'tidal* (justice), thereby fulfilling the research objectives stated in the introduction. The results indicate that habituation-based moderation education moves beyond cognitive understanding and declarative teaching, transforming religious moderation into lived pedagogical practices embedded in daily school life. This process significantly contributes to the development of students' tolerant attitudes, inclusive communication skills, empathy, and peaceful conflict management. Thus, the findings confirm that habituation is a strategic and effective approach for fostering moderate religious character among elementary school students in multicultural settings.

However, this study has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single elementary school, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. Second, the qualitative case study design relies heavily on participants' perspectives and researcher interpretation, which may introduce subjectivity despite the use of triangulation. Third, this research did not employ longitudinal observation, so the long-term sustainability of habituation

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outcomes on students' attitudes could not be measured. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to employ comparative and multi-site studies across different regions and school types to strengthen external validity. Longitudinal research designs are also needed to examine the long-term impact of habituation-based moderation education on students' character development. Additionally, future studies may integrate mixed-method approaches to quantitatively measure changes in tolerance levels and explore the role of family and community environments in reinforcing habituation practices. Such research would enrich the discourse on religious moderation education and provide more comprehensive guidance for policy and practice.

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